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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JAKARTA 013304

SIPDIS

FROM AMCONSUL SURABAYA 2681

SIPDIS

SECSTATE FOR EAP/MTS

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TAGS: PGOV KISL ID

SUBJECT: East Java: NU Political Clout Diminished As  
PKB Splits

(U) Classified by Pol/Econ Officer David Williams,  
reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

REFS:

A: 05 JAKARTA 8492 (PKB MUDDLING ALONG IN EAST JAVA)  
B: JAKARTA 12778( EAST JAVA'S MUSLIM LEADERS,  
OBSERVERS COMMENT ON NU-MUHAMMADIYAH RELATIONS)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In the final battle for control of the National Awakening Party (PKB), Nahdatul Ulama's (NU) political wing and Indonesia's 4th largest political party, the Indonesian Supreme Court ruled on October 12 against East Java PKB Chairman Choiral Anam's attempt to overthrow former Indonesian President Abdurrahmin Wahid as party leader. Admitting defeat, Anam has vowed to form a new political party and is recruiting conservative leaning East and Central Java NU clerics to back his new party, the National Clerics Awakening Party (PKNU). Wahid has impotently threatened local PKB politicians who support Anam with removal from their posts. Local political analysts predict PKB will lose up to one third of its support to the new party in 2008 local elections in East and Central Java, PKB's stronghold provinces. The PKB split damages the political influence of NU and is further evidence that growing conservative factions within the 40 million member strong organization are dissatisfied with NU's historically tolerant and pluralistic attitudes. END SUMMARY.

PKB Split Background

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¶2. (SBU) Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Muslim social organization with over 40 million loyal followers, founded the National Awakening Party (PKB) in 1999. NU is a rural based religious organization with most of its clerics (kiai) running pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools) in more than 10,000 villages throughout East and Central Java and incorporates local Javanese tradition and culture into its religious practices. NU clerics command great respect in local communities and their instructions are normally obeyed without reserve (Ref. B). PKB's affiliation with NU and its support by the clerics allow easy mobilization of its members for "get out the vote" efforts to support PKB candidates. In the 2004 national elections, PKB ran fourth nationally, throwing its support to

President Yudhoyono and won control of the East and Central Java Provincial legislatures. Half of the 38 regents in East Java are PKB affiliated.

¶3. (SBU) Former President Abdurahman Wahid has been the driving force behind the PKB. Revered as a "living saint" (Note: Followers believe his spiritual powers are evidenced by his surviving three major strokes), Wahid dominates the party's decision-making mechanisms. Wahid's absolute authority allowed him to fire or freeze local PKB chairmen for challenging his commands. The arbitrary nature of many of Wahid's decisions led a number of high ranking clerics and party officials to do the unthinkable - publicly challenge him. The opposition included his political protege Choirul Anam, chairman of East Java PKB. Anger erupted in April 2005 when Wahid held a PKB Conference and sacked his former Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab from his post as national chairman of PKB and replaced him with Wahid's nephew Muhamimin Iskandar (Ref. A). A group of clerics from East and Central Java held an October 2005 "alternate" conference in Surabaya which elected Choirul Anam as the chairman of PKB. Both the Wahid and Anam camps exchanged lawsuits in the Jakarta courts with Anam consistently losing and appealing the verdicts to higher courts.

Wahid Retains Control

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¶4. (C) The Indonesian Supreme Court issued its final verdict October 12, rejecting Anam's appeal and vesting control of the PKB in Wahid. Several

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prominent NU clerics are supporting Anam to file a judicial review to the Supreme Court to overturn the verdict, but the chances of succeeding are slim. Taufikurahman, a PKB member of the national parliament from Lamongan, East Java and a member of Wahid's inner-circle, told us that Wahid was always confident of retaining control of PKB because President Yudhoyono prefers Wahid as an important moderate figure in Indonesian politics representing pluralism and secularism to the masses. In addition, Wahid supported Yudhoyono during his 2004 presidential campaign by appointing Wahid's Harvard educated and former Australian journalist daughter Jenny as "ambassador" to the campaign, escorting and introducing Yudhoyono to NU pesantrens throughout East and Central Java. According to Taufikurahman, this demonstration of support and tacit approval of Yudhoyono by Wahid was critical to Yudhoyono's acceptance by local villagers as a legitimate presidential candidate and his eventual victory over Megawati in the 2004 national elections.

Anam Forms New Party - PKNU

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¶5. (C) After his Supreme Court defeat, Anam vowed to start a new party he named the National Cleric Awakening Party (PKNU). He is recruiting conservative NU clerics in East and Central Java who disagree with Wahid's liberal views on Islam and oppose his choices for PKB candidates. Anam named his "Team of 17" consisting of clerics publicly supporting his move. Kiai Faqih, the highly respected leader of Pesantren Langitan in Tuban, East Java and well-known NU kiai, is the leading figure among the group. Kiai Faqih is a noted conservative figure in NU having issued fatwas (religious decrees) prohibiting NU members from voting for a woman for public office and denouncing the existence of the NGO Islam Liberal Network and

its campaign for Islamic moderation in Indonesia. Anam has garnered support from other NU conservative kiai by promising them a public forum to express their conservative views and to influence on-going public policy debates such as the anti-pornography bill. According to Fathorashid, speaker of the East Java Provincial Legislature (DPRD) and close contact of Anam's, the draw to the party will be its use of clerics to nominate and choose its candidates.

There will be a "democratic" process within the party; the kiai will elect party candidates, thus cementing their interest and commitment to support PKNU's candidates. PKNU supporters see this party structure as the party's "hook", appealing to a wide range of NU clerics disappointed with Wahid's authoritarian and non-consultative leadership of PKB. The name PKNU was specifically derived to contain "NU" as a marketing tool to more closely associate the party with NU, a strategy East Java NU leaders deride.

#### Politicians Forced to Choose Sides

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¶6. (C) East and Central Java PKB politicians are being forced to choose sides. According to statements by Wahid to the press, Anam supporters may no longer use PKB symbols, colors or offices. Fathorashid told us that Wahid sent him a letter ordering him to step down as East Java DPRD speaker and resign from the DPRD. Since there is no legal mechanism for the PKB to remove him, he plans to stick the letter in a drawer and run as an incumbent in the 2008 local elections. Wahid threatened arrest for PKB elected politicians supporting Anam without giving up their positions, but none as yet have surrendered their positions. As added incentive, both groups are fighting for government funds allocated to support political parties. The Ministry of Home Affairs announced September 21, ahead of the Supreme Court ruling, that PKB funds would be disbursed to Wahid's PKB faction. The Ministry also instructed all governors, regents and mayors to do the same. Taufikurahman offered the

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Ministry's decision as further evidence that the central government is siding with Wahid. Fathorahid admitted that the PKNU has limited funding at this point and said they expected to raise USD 550,000 for the 2008 East and Central Java local campaigns.

#### Both Sides Likely Losers

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¶7. (C) Asfar, an astute political observer from Airlangga University in Surabaya, predicts that PKB would lose one-third of its support in East and Central Java to the PKNU. He believes that the two largest national political parties, Golkar and PDI-P, will take advantage of the PKB split, taking votes from both factions. A two-thirds/one-third split will mean both PKB factions will be under the 20 percent minimum needed to field its own candidate in coming East and Central Java local elections. Both parties will likely need to join forces with other smaller parties to field candidates. Asfar predicts that loyal NU followers may become confused as to which NU clerics to follow and feel "released" to vote for any party in future elections. According to Aribowo, a member of East Java DPRD's expert political council, PKNU's success will depend heavily on which NU clerics Anam is able to bring into his party's fold. Aribowo estimates 20-30 percent of PKB's votes will slide to PKNU and that due to their internal squabbling, the two parties

combined will lose 10-20 percent of their local support to other parties. He sees the final split of PKB votes as a referendum on the NU electorate's attitudes on the importance of social issues (education, healthcare and the economy), which favor PKB, versus religious issues (anti-pornography legislation and sharia law), which favor PKNU. Fathorashid agrees that the local kiais are the key to winning, "The people will do what ever they say. The key for us is to get the kiais that are tired of Wahid on our side."

Comment

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¶8. (C) The pettiness of the internal PKB conflict, seen as a personality conflict between the two leaders, has damaged the reputations of all those involved and distanced NU voters from both the PKB and the PKNU. It is doubtful that PKB can match its strong 2004 performance in coming local elections whether the PKNU is formed or not. The structure of the PKNU would bring NU and its kiais firmly into the political arena, an area NU, as a social organization, has staunchly avoided. (Note: In the past, NU has been criticized for not taking a political stance against repressive central governments with poor human rights records.) PKNU's leaders, not noted for their conservative views, are convinced their gimmick will be very appealing to a large number of their "target market" conservative kiais. PKB insiders are concerned that if the PKNU can strip away support from more conservative NU clerics, both parties will seem unbalanced - either too "liberal" or too "conservative" - with both becoming less appealing to the average voter. The kiais most attracted to the concept of the new party are those more socially conservative and disenfranchised with Wahid's liberal leanings and unwillingness to listen to any other voice than his own. The PKB split and potential emergence of an alternative party is further evidence that growing conservative factions within NU are looking for a way to voice their social and religious views without going so far as to join more radical, "anti-Indonesia" Islamist parties.

PASCOE